

SIMONIDES

Victory Odes

- 506 Which of the men of today has bound on his
brows
in myrtle leaves or wreaths of rose
so many victories in regional competition?
- 507 That Ram was duly fleeced*
when he went to the splendid wooded precinct of
Zeus.
- 508 As when in the month of storms
Zeus chastens fourteen days,
that men on earth call time of forgotten winds,
holy brood-time of the coloured kingfisher.
- 509 Not even the strong Polydeuces
would hold up his fists against him,
or the iron son of Alcmena.*
- 511 [Heaven-bor]n Kronos' glorious son [himself]
[honour]s Aiatios' clan; far-shooting
Apollo of the golden lyre marks it out,
and shining Delphi, where the horse-race . . .
.
- [by proclamation most w]elcome
they declared the man of Pyrrhus' line*
king supreme of the province; and . . .
with good fortune for Thessaly, and for all the
people . . .
- 512 Drink, drink at this fortune!
- 515 Hail, daughters of storm-swift mares.*
- 516 And the dust went up from your chariot-wheel
for the wind to carry away.
- 517 in case he let the brown straps slip from his hands.

519 fr. 79

Whoever . . .
 let him be cheerful even though
 he's let . . . fall to the ground.
 Many men pray . . . and to win prestige
 by mounting fair-named Victory's car,
 but only for one does the goddess
 make room so he can leap
 aboard her great chariot.

519 fr. 92

And may he walk round
 . . . with a new race completed . . .
 . . . cheerful . . . prosperity to come . . .
 I rejoice, and hold a protecting arm
 about him, like a mother round her youngest son.

Paeans

519 fr. 32

. . . of the doughty Carians . . .
 . . . on the banks of . . . 's streams they set up
 a fair [dance in the] meadows; for now [the
 goddess]*
 was burdened with the private toils of birth.
 . . . cried out . . . from her holy womb, and . . .
 sent forth . . . Hear me . . .

519 fr. 35

. . . from holy Parnes . . .
 . . . look down, Apollo
 on the land of . . . Athena.
 . . . here well-disposed
 . . . spring will not pass.
 . . . we support the toil . . .
 . . . the virgin Artemis who runs
 in the mountains; and thee, far-shooting lord,
 we [hymn] with gentle [strains], uttering
 auspicious cry
 that comes from hearts in concord.

519 fr. 55

. . . the glens . . . Lycian [Apollo,]

her finest of sons. Ië, ië!

Cry hallelujah, Delian maids,

with reverent [dance!]

[when sp]ring comes. Lady of D[elos, gold of] face,

. . . we in song . . . fortune . . .

519 fr. 77

. . . of spring . . .

. . . of white . . . garlands . . .

. . . sprouting many a . . .

and carrying many leaves

of the native [bay?] he approached,

regardless of Poseidon, the master of the earth.

Dirges

520 Man's strength is but little, and futile his concerns,
his lifespan short, filled with trouble on trouble;
and over it death, inescapable, uniform, looms,
to be dispensed in equal shares
to high and low alike.

521 As you are mortal, don't ever affirm what
tomorrow will bring,
or how long the man that you see in good fortune
will keep it:
not even the wing-spreading house-fly
changes perch so fast.

522 For all things come to the same
Charybdis and are flushed away,
all great distinction and wealth.

523 Not even those of former times,
hero sons of the lords of heaven,
lived lives free of toil and danger and death
unto old age.

524 But then death overtakes
even the man who flees from the fight.

526 None wins distinction without the gods, no man,
no city. God is the one
who can contrive all things: in mortal life
nothing is safe from harm.

527 There is no ill that men should not expect;
in a short space of time God
reshuffles everything.

531 When men die [for their country,]
fame is their fortune, fair their fate,
their tomb an altar; in the place of wailing
there is remembrance, and their dirge is praise.
This winding-sheet is such
as neither mould nor Time that conquers all
can fade; this sepulchre
of fine men has adopted as its sacristan
Greece's good name. Witness Leonidas,*
the king of Sparta: he has left
a monument of valour, and perennial fame.

From various lyric poems

538 All larks must sport a crest.

541 . . . distinguishes fair and foul. And if
someone who has no shutters to his mouth
cavils, why, smoke is ineffectual stuff,
gold does not stain, and truth
alone prevails. But God
grants few men such distinction as endures
throughout: it is no easy thing
to keep high standards, for despite himself
a man is overborne
by irresistible desire of gain
or the scheming Love-goddess's compelling itch
or lively rivalries.
Still, if he cannot keep
the path of sanctity throughout his life,
but to his best ability . . .

542 For a man to be truly good is difficult,
fashioned foursquare in hands and feet and mind
without a blemish . . .

Nor does the saying of Pittacus ring true
 to me, although a wise man was its source:
 he said that being good was *difficult*.
 That honour's God's alone: a man
 can't help but sink, if he be caught
 by helpless circumstance.
 Any man's good if his affairs go well,
 and bad if they go badly; so
 they're best for longest, whom the immortals bless.

Therefore I will not waste my allotted span
 of life in vain and insubstantial hope,
 trying to find what is not possible,
 a perfect human soul, of all
 of us who cull the broad earth's fruits—
 I'll tell you if I do.

No, I commend and favour anyone
 who does no scurvy thing from choice—
 even the gods can't fight necessity.

. . . I'm not bent
 on finding fault. It's good enough for me
 if someone's not a rogue or too
 shiftless, and knows the public good
 that comes from righteousness,
 a sane man; I'll not criticize him, for
 the breed of fools is infinite.
 All things are fair that have no foul mixed in.

543 . . . Danae, when in the carven chest*
 the wind blowing and the sea stirring
 shattered her with fear. Her cheeks were wet
 as she put her loving arm round Perseus, saying,
 'Oh, child! What trouble is mine,
 yet you can slumber, in your innocence
 snoring on comfortless timber, bronze-riveted,
 in the black gloom of unlit night.
 The passing wave's deep spray upon your hair
 disturbs you not, or the wind's keening,
 as you lie in your royal-red shawl, bonny face.

If fear were fear to you,
even the sound of my words
would catch your tiny ear.

Yes, sleep, baby; and sleep, sea!

Sleep, measureless misery!

O father Zeus,

grant some sign of a change of thy will;
and if I speak too bold at all, or out of place,
forgive me.'

571 and I am paralysed
by the din of the purple brine as it surges all
round.

545 (*Jason*)

He settled in Corinth, he did not dwell
in Magnesia; and living with his Colchian wife
he ruled over Thranos and Lechaeum.

550 (*Aegeus gave Theseus*)

a red sail, stained with the juice
of the springing holm-oak's bloom.

551 I would have brought you a greater blessing—life—
had I come earlier.*

553 They wept for violet-wreathed Eurydice's
poor unweaned babe, as he
breathed out his sweet life-soul.

555 well given by Hermes god of the contest, son
of Maia, the mountain nymph with curling lashes,
loveliest of the seven
dear dark-tressed daughters that Atlas fathered,
called
the Doves of heaven, the Peleiades.*

559 As for you, mother of twenty,
be gracious, Hecuba.

564 . . . Meleager, who in the javelin
beat all the young men, hurling
over Anauros' eddying stream
from Iolcus' vineland: so have Homer
and Stesichorus sung the tale to all.

- 595 For not so much as a breeze to shake a leaf
then moved, that might prevent
the honeysweet voice of the Sirens as it spread abroad
from lodging in their mortal ears.*
- 567 And over Orpheus' head
birds without number flew,
while straight up from the darkling wave
the fish leapt to his lovely song.
- 572 Against the men of Corinth
Ilios nurses no wrath, nor the Danaans.
- 575 (*Eros*)
You cruel child of scheming Aphrodite
that she bore to the evil god of war.
- 577(a) (*Cassotis*,*)
where for cleansing of hands
the lovely-haired Muses' holy water is drawn
from below.
- 577(b) Clio, that watchest over the holy
cleansing of hands . . . gold-robed . . .
as for many a prayer they draw
the lovely, fragrant water from the ambrosial
depths.
- 579 There is a tale
that Merit dwells on high rocks, hard to climb
. . . patrols the holy place.
Not all men's eyes may look upon her—only he
who sheds heart-stinging sweat
and reaches the summit of manly endeavour.
- 581 Who of sound mind could assent
to that Lindian, Cleobulus,* who against
the perennial flow of rivers, the flowers of spring,
the flame of the sun, the gold of the moon
and swirl of the sea
pitted the strength of a mere *tombstone*?
All things yield to the gods: a stone
even man's arts can shatter. That was the thought
of a fool.
- 582 Even silence has its reward of safety.

- 583 You cock of delightful voice.
584 For, void of pleasure, what human life's
desirable, what monarchy?
Without that, even the gods' eternity
were nothing enviable.
- 585 From her red mouth
the girl gave voice.
- 586 When the twittering
sallow-necked nightingales of spring . . .
- 587 For this was what the Centaurs most abhorred:
fi-ire.*
- 590 Even what's tough
becomes attractive in emergencies.
- 591 Horse-breeding does not go
with a Zacynthus, but with fertile acres.
- 592 Beside the pure refiner's gold
not even having lead to show.
- 593 The bee frequents the flowers,
contriving the yellow honey.
- 594 A glorious reputation
is the last thing to sink below the earth.
- 597 Sonorous harbinger of fragrant spring,
blue swallow.
- 598 Appearance even overbears the truth.
- 599 And he with sweet sleep in his gift . . .
- 600 A wind pricking into the sea.
- 601 Man-mastering sleep.
- 602 The new wine cannot yet
discredit last year's offering from the vine.
This is the empty-headed claim of boys.*
- 603 For what has come to pass
will not now be undone.
- 604 Not even lovely skill in poetry
gives any joy, unless one has
the dignity of health.
- 605 There's only one sun in the sky.

Elegiac poems

The Battle of Artemisium

el. 3 by the immortals' will . . .

Zetes and Kalais* . . .

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.

[They came as swif]t as dee[r, the sons of Boreas]
[and Oreithyia,] maid with lovely hair.

[They stirred the] sea up from its murky bed, [and
roused]

[the Old Man, b]right-famed [guardian] of the
deep,

[who spoke in prophecy:] 'What is this distant
[din]

[I hear] b[rush]ing my ears, [as of a battle?']

el. 9 throwing sticks and stones upon . . .

The Battle of Plataea

el. 10 . . . for m[y compos]ition . . .

[O son of] sea-[nymph],* glorious in thy fame.

el. 11 str[uck you . . . and you fell, as when a larch]
or pine-tree in the [lonely mountain] glades
is felled by woodcutters . . .

and much . . .

[A great grief seized] the war-host; [much they
honoured you,]

[and with Patr]oclus' [ashes mingled yours.]

[It was no ordinary mortal] laid you low,

['twas by Apoll]o's hand [that you were struck.]

[Athena] was at [hand, and smote the famous
t]ow[n]

[with Hera: they were wro]th with Priam's sons
[because of P]aris' wickedness. The car of God's
Justice o'ertakes [the sinner in the end.]

[And so] the valiant Danaans, [best of warr]iors,
sacked the much-sung-of city, and came [home;]

[and they] are bathed in fame that cannot die, by
grace

[of one who from the dark-]tressed Muses had
the tru[th entire,] and made the heroes'
short-lived race

a theme familiar to younger men.

[But] now farewell, [thou son] of goddess glorious,
[daughter] of Nereus of the sea, while I
[now summon] thee, i[llustriou]s Muse, to my
support,

[if thou hast any thought] for men who pray:
[fit ou]t, as is thy wont, this [grat]eful song-a[rray]
[of mi]ne, so that rem[embrance is preserved]
of those who held the line for Spart[a and for
Greece,]

[that none should see] the da[y of slavery.]
They kept their co[urage, and their fame rose]
heaven-high;

[their glory in] the world [will] never die.
[From the Eu]rotas and from [Sparta's] town they
[marched,]

accompanied by Zeus' horsemaster sons,
[the Tyndarid] Heroes, and by Menelaus'
strength,*

[those doughty] captains of [their fath]ers' folk,
led forth by [great Cleo]mbrotus' most noble [son,]
... Pausanias.

[They quickly reached the Isthmus] and the
famous land

of Corinth, [furthest bounds] of Pelops' [isle,]
[and Megara, N]isus' [ancient] city, where the
r[est]

[then joined the army from] the country round.
[Again they marched, the ome]ns giving
confidence,

[and soon they reached Eleusis'] lovely plain,
driving [the Persians from Pan]dion's [land, by
help]

of that most godlike se[er, the Iamid.*]

... overcame ...

el. 13 to drive away [the army] of the Medes
and Persians, and . . .
 the sons of Dorus* and of Heracles.
When they [came down] into [the broad Boeotian]
 plain
 and [the Medes] facing them came into view,
. . . they sat down (?) . . .

el. 14 (*Prophecy of Tisamenus*)
 [. . . cl]ash of blows on [shields]
 [. . . I de]clare that, should the a[rmy pr]ess
 [across] the river* first . . .
a great disaster will [be theirs; but if they wait,]
 [a victory that] ne'er shall be for[got.]
[And . . .] will drive them [out of A]si[a too]
 [with Zeus'] approval, favouring a n[ew]
alliance; for [. . . will la]y a firm base . . .

el. 15+16
And in the centre stood well-watered Ephyra's
 men,
 well versed in every martial excellence,
and those who dwelt in Corinth, Glaucus' capital.
They had the finest witness to their work—
of precious gold, in heaven, one that magnifies
 their fathers' far-famed glory with their own.

el. 19 This finest single thing the Chian said:*
'As is the breed of leaves, e'en so is that of man.'
 Few mortals who have had that in their ears
have taken it to heart, for everyone relies
 on hope; it's planted in a young man's breast.

el. 20 . . . only a short time . . .
 . . . abiding . . .
A mortal, while he has the lovely bloom of youth,
 has many empty-headed, vain ideas.
He has no expectation of old age or death,
 and while in health, has no thought of disease.
They're fools who have that attitude, and do not
 know
 the time allowed to us for youth and life

is short. Take note of this, and till your days are
done

don't waver, treat your soul to all that's nice.

. . . Ponder the [saying of a man] of old—

for Homer's tongue's escaped [oblivion;]

all-conquer[ing Time has spared him, never
dimmed his name,]

[and never found his testimony] false.

. . . in festivity . . .

. . . well-turned [arguments (?)]

el. 21

My soul, I cannot be your watchful guardian.

I've ruefully respected pure-faced Right

ever since first I saw on my young growing thighs

the signs that my boy's life was at an end,

and that the ivory gleam was interspersed with

black,

and from the snows . . .

Restrained by in[hibition . . .] youth's disorderly

. . .

el. 22

I should like to sail

[with cargo] of the dark-wreathed [Muses'] art

and come to that tree-shaded home [of sainted

men,]

that airy island where life has its crown;

and there I'd see my auburn Echekratidas

[with these old eyes, and take him by the hand,

so that his lovely skin's young bloom [should

breathe on me,]

and he'd distil sweet longing from his eyes.

Reclining [with the lad] among the flowers, I'd

[have]

[a lovely time, slough] my white wrinkles off;

and for my hair I'd weave a fresh, delightful

wreath

of new-sprung [galingale . . .]

and I would sing a charming, clear-voiced [song of

love,]

plying my tongue in elo[quent . . .]

el. 23

Wine, defence against unhappiness.

- el. 24 Nothing of Bacchus' must be cast aside,
even a grape-pip.
- el. 25 The stuff* with which the North Wind, rushing
down from Thrace,
once made a covering for Olympus' flanks,
and stung the hearts of cloakless men, and then
withdrew,
buried alive in the Pierian soil—
let me be served my share of that too. It's not nice
to bring a friend a warm drink for a toast.
- el. 26 For broad as it was,* it did not reach to me.
- el. 86 But if, daughter of Zeus, the best must be
acclaimed,
then Athens' people did it all alone.
- el. 87 And best of witnesses, the gold that shines in
heaven.
- el. 88 Time has sharp teeth, and gnaws
all things away, even the mightiest.
- el. 89 For memory none, I claim, can match Simonides,
eighty years old, son of Leoprepes.
- el. 90 A man learns from the community.
- el. 91 When I behold the tomb of Megacles,
I feel your suffering, poor Callias.
- el. 92* Muse, sing to me of the fair-ankled Alcmena's son:
the son of Alcmena sing to me, Muse, the
fair-ankled one.

Simonides

- 507 *That Ram was duly fleeced*: referring to the defeat of a wrestler Krios, whose name meant 'ram'.
- 509 *son of Alcmena*: Heracles.
- 511 *the man of Pyrrhus' line*: the noble Thessalian family called the Aleuadai, with whom Simonides was friendly, traced its descent from one Pyrrhus, perhaps identified with Achilles' son Neoptolemus.
- 515 *daughters of storm-swift mares*: a high-flown periphrasis for 'mules'. The poem celebrated a victory in a mule-cart race at Olympia won by Anaxilas, tyrant of Rhegium.
- 519 fr. 32 *the goddess*: Leto, mother of Apollo and Artemis.
- 531 *Leonidas*: the leader of the Spartans who died heroically defending the pass at Thermopylae in 480.
- 543 *in the carven chest*: when Danae, in spite of all her father's precautions, was impregnated by Zeus and gave birth to Perseus, she and the baby were put out to sea in a chest.
- 551 *had I come earlier*: the red sail mentioned in 550 was meant to be hoisted as a signal if Theseus returned to Athens successfully from his expedition against the Minotaur, to save Aegeus waiting for the ship to dock. Theseus forgot to hoist it, and his father, assuming the worst, threw himself off the Acropolis. 551 is apparently spoken to Aegeus by a messenger who arrives too late.
- 555 *the Peleiades*: the star-group known as the Pleiades or Peleiades (the latter form means 'doves') was identified with the seven nymphs who were Atlas' daughters.
- 595 *their mortal ears*: those of the Argonauts, who, like Odysseus, sailed by the Sirens' island. They were able to overcome the temptation to tarry because they had Orpheus with them, and his singing, described in the following fragment, was sweeter even than that of the Sirens.
- 577a *Cassotis*: the probable name of a spring at Delphi where the Muses had a shrine. Clio was the senior Muse.
- 581 *Cleobulus*: later considered one of the Seven Sages; here treated as the author of a famous epitaph for King Midas of Phrygia—

otherwise ascribed to Homer—which declared that the bronze statue over the tomb would remain

so long as fountains spring and tall trees grow,
so long as sun and bright moon rise and shine,
and rivers run, and sea-waves wash the shore.

587 *fi-ire*: Simonides spread the word for fire, *pyr*, over two or three musical notes, probably to imitate its flickering.

602 *the empty-headed claim of boys*: these lines are said to have been composed in criticism of a competition judge who had awarded a prize to the younger poet Pindar instead of to Simonides.

ELEGIES

3 *Zetes and Kalais*: the two supernatural sons of the North Wind, Boreas. The Athenians are said to have prayed to Boreas before the battle of Artemisium, and in response he roused the three-day storm which wrecked a good portion of the Persian navy.

10 *O son of sea-nymph*: Achilles, son of Thetis. This elegy began with a lengthy proemium addressed to the hero.

11 *and by Menelaus' strength*: the legendary king Menelaus, Agamemnon's brother, was worshipped at Sparta as a hero. Like the Tyndarids, Castor and Polydeuces, he was imagined still to have power to help his people, and images of all three were carried with the army.

the Iamid: Tisamenus, the army's official priest and diviner, claimed descent from the ancient seer Iamus.

13 *Dorus*: the ancestor of the Dorians. On the connection with Heracles' family see the notes on Tyrtaeus 2 and 19.

14 *the river*: the Asopus. This prophecy by Tisamenus before the battle of Plataea is recorded by Herodotus (9. 36).

19 *the Chian said*: the Chian is Homer, Chios being one of the chief claimants to the honour of having been his birthplace. The verse quoted is from the *Iliad*, 6. 146.

25 *The stuff*: snow, used for cooling wine. 'Buried alive' refers to its storage underground. Simonides is said to have improvised this elegant riddle on a hot summer evening when he saw others getting their wine chilled.

26 *broad as it was*: a similar story tells that Simonides came out with this verse (adapted from *Iliad* 14. 33) when he saw other guests being served with hare and himself being missed out.

92 Simonides rearranges the same words to make two verses in different metres. See Timocreon, elegiac/iambic fragment 10, for a rude comment in the same format.